

Kwamena's Law

Nikki Owens,

Cousin of William Green, murdered by police on January 27, 2020 in Prince George's County, Maryland

There is not a day since January 28, 2020 that I haven't thought about how my cousin was murdered. Not a day has passed that I haven't thought about the loss of someone I loved and who loved me. Not a day has passed that I haven't wanted to cry knowing he died mercilessly and at the hands of someone whose employment his tax dollars paid for.

I think about what his last thoughts must have been. The fear he suffered knowing he was dying and leaving his kids fatherless. I think about the pain he must have felt when those six bullets entered his body. How powerless he felt. He didn't die quickly, so I think of how he suffered. He was executed. He complied and they still killed him.

On the evening of January 27, 2020, William Green was murdered by Prince George's County Police Captain Michael Owen. I saw the story on the evening news, but the victim was not identified. In the early morning hours of January 28th, I received a phone call that changed my world.

Boo Boo is dead. The pain I felt hearing those words is indescribable. The pain I feel now, over two years later, writing these words is indescribable. I looked at my phone to see if he had sent his daily good morning text with emojis, there was nothing. My cousin, who was a father, a son, a brother, a nephew, an uncle, a friend to so many, was gone. Hundreds of us are left behind to live our new normal, our life without Boo Boo. This pain is not only my pain, this is the pain of many Prince George's County residents and their families.

The killing of this one man caused pain to hundreds, affected thousands. We must remember that it's not just one person whose life is changed forever. It's the people who are left behind who have their whole lives changed as well. We are the new, living victims of police brutality. We are left behind to deal with the devastation.

According to the Citizen Complaint Oversight Panel in Prince George's County, there were 598 allegations of misconduct reported in 2016, 489 reported in 2017, 411 reported in 2018, and 495 reported in 2019. This means that there are thousands of family members and loved ones victimized due to police brutality and excessive force, and I join them in the struggle for police reform. Together, we demand change to a broken policing and judicial system that has for too long chosen to watch us suffer without justice.

Owen, the officer who killed my cousin, has been able to terrorize and kill citizens of Prince George's County while being rewarded and receiving worker's compensation payments for psychological stress for the majority of his years of service. Owen also had a history of failing to appear in court that surprisingly was not addressed by his commanding officers. As of today, Michael Owen is still a Prince George's County Police Officer, although he has been in jail since January 28, 2020. How is this possible?

As we all watch Black and Brown people being beaten and murdered on video, on the news, daily throughout the US, this seems to go unnoticed by legislators and people in positions of power within our state and local governments. This seems to be acceptable as "the norm" by the people in positions to stop these traumatizing abuses. The Graham report identified a broken system, from top to bottom, yet we still have elected officials unwilling to make the necessary changes ensure the safety of citizens.

The Prince George's County police department is currently a poorly managed agency full of corruption, cover-ups, and racism. As I watched my cousin murdered on camera, I was sickened knowing that elected officials and community "leaders" are more interested in silencing and appeasing, not changing and improving. The very people who took an oath to do what's best for citizens of this county has instead done what's best for special interest groups, large campaign donors, and corporations.

I am asking you to read the story of William Green, to understand that the deliberate actions taken by Michael Owen that day were due to a system driven by unaccountability and corruption. We must pass laws that will ensure real change to the system. We need a heightened statewide use of force standard. We need to make investigations into police misconduct transparent.

Please remember his name. William "Boo Boo" Green. The long history of corruption and abuse by Prince George's County police has not improved since his death, until the people elected to ensure change actually does their job, there will never be accountability, for anyone.

I am submitting this statement in support of Kwamena's Law. The officer that murdered William Green did not have a body camera, nor was there a dashcam in use. There was a citizen with a cellular phone that video taped the encounter. Like many other people of color, she is aware of the unconstitutional behavior by police in America against citizens, she had the forethought to pull out a phone and tape her interaction, for her safety. If this private citizen hadn't video taped the murder of my cousin, Michael Owen would still be in uniform, terrorizing innocent citizens today. This man had many incidents of use of force, he triggered the early warning system, yet as of the death of William Green, no superior had addressed the issue. As a family, we will never know what happened in that vehicle that day, we will never understand why this officer chose to fire seven shots inside his police cruiser at an unarmed handcuffed man. What we do know is

that the officer's account of what happened in the vehicle doesn't match the video or the coroner's report, yet it would have been used as the only source of information by PGPD to justify this heinous crime. "In fear of my life" was what he wrote to justify his crime. These are the words taught to officers to justify the unjustifiable.

Most employers have video cameras in their facilities to ensure the safety of their employees and the ensure the safety of their business interest. Wearing body cameras and having dash cameras should provide a sense of security to officers, ensuring that they can have proof that they followed processes and procedures when dealing with the public. To ensure they have proof of their version of events that will serve as public record for the judicial system and justify the actions taken by the court. We are unfortunately experiencing pushback by officers, FOP, and public officials when it comes to body cameras, in an effort to "protect police". Not only does these efforts raise concerns, they also raise suspicion. To see states, pass laws that make it illegal to video tape officers in public is scary and again proves that our elected officials are choosing special interest over public safety and constitutional rights.

Extending camera use to plain clothes officers is a necessity, and there should not be any concerns about violating privacy. The constitution allows a limited amount of 'reasonable expectation of privacy' in public places, as with any cases that goes to court, the court will determine if the evidence provided is acceptable or not (*Kyllo v. United States*). Plain clothes officers carry fire arms and engage with the public as an officer of the law, therefore their encounters should be on camera as well. The data that shows the number of uses of force and deaths of citizens by plain clothes officers should also be considered by our law makers. We are asking, again, for the people paid by citizens, elected by citizens, and expected to do what's in the best interest of citizens to stop idling watching these abuse and deaths of citizens and STOP IT! The laws work, this is why we don't see hundreds of thousands of white Americans protesting police brutality and watching their loved ones' die unarmed. We are simply asking for the people who are responsible for enforcing and implementing the laws to do so unbiased. To treat ALL citizens equally. This is not a law problem this is a people issue. Kwamena would still be here is the laws, policies, and procedures were applied without bias. Because he is not, we, impacted family members, are again asking for lawmakers to fix broken policing.

Painfully,

Nikki Owens